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New Jersey Moves To Take Control of School District

By Lisa Jennings

TRENTON, N.J.—Education Commissioner Saul A. Cooperman of New Jersey last week began proceedings to take control of the Jersey City public schools, describing the urban district as "bleak" and rife with political patronage, cronyism, and fiscal misdealings.

In the first use of the state's new school-intervention law, the commissioner issued a show-cause order to district officials, giving them until June 3 to demonstrate why the schools should not be taken over and operated by the state.

Though several states have similar intervention laws, Jersey City is the first school district in the nation determined to be in a state of "academic bankruptcy." *(See related story on page 12.)*

Education officials also filed a separate motion with the New Jersey office of administrative law for "emergent relief," which could place the district's fiscal and personnel management under state control as early as mid-June.

In a May 24 press conference here, Mr. Cooperman released a three-volume, 2,000-page report on the failing Jersey City district. The massive report, Mr. Cooperman said, documents the results of a comprehensive compliance investigation that began in June 1987 and cost $200,000.

The report details what he described as "innumerable deficiencies that go to the heart of the district's operation."

"The school district has failed the children and the residents of the city," Mr. Cooperman said. "Our first priority must be to serve as advocates for these kids to make sure they get the education they deserve."

The report also charges that district officials violated state contract-bidding laws and allowed political interference in school affairs.

"The Jersey City School District can be characterized as a public enterprise that has reached a state of managerial bankruptcy," the report says. "The district clearly lacks the resolve or resources that are essential prerequisites for the fundamental redirection of the schools."

Gov. Thomas H. Kean proposed the inter-

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Key State Charges Against The Jersey City School District:

- Jersey City schools are in a "dire situation, and the district remains unable and/or incapable of correcting its own problems."
- The Jersey City Board of Education has "a deeply rooted history of governance problems" that continues to the present.
- The district's employees are treated "unfairly and with indifference."
- "Widespread political patronage, nepotism, cronyism, and union pressure is a consistent motivation for hiring, firing, promotion, and deployment of staff."
- "Innumerable" state contract-bidding laws have been violated.
- The school district has "repeatedly failed to meet state requirements for academic-performance standards."
- School facilities are in "deplorable" condition and constantly in need of repair—some to the point of creating a hazardous environment for staff members and students.
- Fiscal management has been "corrupt" and "inefficient," and has violated district and state policy.
- The "systemic failure" of the district has resulted in "thousands of children . . . being deprived of the educational services that constitute a thorough and efficient system of education."

AP/Wide World Photos

Saul Cooperman, the state education commissioner, announcing the takeover.

E.D. Rights Tally Still Bypassing Many Districts

Survey Method Misses Thousands, Data Show

By Julie A. Miller

WASHINGTON—In 1984, when the Education Department's office for civil rights altered the way school districts are selected for its semiannual survey, education and civil-rights groups argued that the changes would severely reduce its usefulness.

In planning for the 1988 survey—which provides the only federal data on civil-rights compliance in education—O.C.R. has quietly inched back toward its old method, rescinding a change that allowed large districts to sample only certain schools and designing the sample to include more districts that have not been surveyed recently.

But an *Education Week* analysis of agency records indicates that, even with the planned changes, the 1988 survey will again bypass many districts not surveyed recently. That group includes more than half of all school districts in the country.

O.C.R.'s failure to survey all or most districts periodically is the chief complaint of its critics, who argued in 1984 that the agency should retain a system that ensured that all districts above a certain size would be surveyed at least once every six years.

About 2,000 districts that were included at least once in the 1978-1980-1982 cycle will have been bypassed by the surveys done in 1980, 1982, and 1988, according to the analysis.

In addition, about 7,000 districts, mostly small ones, will not have been included since 1976, when virtually every district in the country was surveyed.

The *Education Week* analysis tabulated the number of districts included in each of the past six survey years for 11 representative states, which encompass almost 6,000 school districts. It also tabulated the num-

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New York Board And Custodians Forge New Pact

By William Snider

For most of the past year, New York City's board of education has locked horns with its custodians' union, whose members have almost total control over the maintenance and operations of the system's 974 buildings.

The board faced intense political and community pressure to wrest concessions from the powerful union, and the negotiations were widely viewed as a test of the board's ability to devise a new solution to one of the system's most serious and long-standing problems.

The two sides finally achieved a tentative agreement May 19 that pleases some, but not all, of the board's critics. It is, in the words of the board's president, Robert F. Wagner Jr., "historic, but not revolutionary."

The new pact will expand the duties of the custodial force and make it easier for the board and community groups to use the schools outside of the normal hours of operation.

And—for the first time—it gives principals some authority over the custodians by granting them a role in custodial evaluations.

But it falls far short, critics argue, of bringing the highly paid and virtually autonomous custodial workforce more directly under the control of the school district's administrators.

New York City's custodians do not fit the

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Low Pay, High Attrition Rates Plaguing Day Care, Study Finds

By Deborah L. Gold

Low teacher salaries and high turnover rates are undercutting the supply and quality of day-care and Head Start programs in New York City, according to a study that experts say underscores an alarming national pattern.

The city's publicly funded child-care programs "are being strangled by an inability to recruit and retain qualified teachers," says the study by the Bank Street College of Education.

"The problem has reached a level where it presents disastrous consequences for both the supply and quality of these programs," concludes the report, "Who Is Teaching? Early Childhood Teachers in New York City's Publicly Funded Programs."

New York is one of many cities across the nation in which growing numbers of working parents are finding it increasingly difficult to find child care outside the home. The shortage comes at a time when education and business leaders are stressing the importance of high-quality early-childhood programs in preventing academic and social problems among disadvantaged children.

Child-care experts say that New York City's problems in attracting and retaining qualified early-childhood teachers are typical of those faced by other parts of the coun-

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Also in the news

Minority Gains Eroding, Carter-Ford Panel Says

The commission urges a broad national effort to bring minorities into the mainstream by the end of the century.

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New York State Will Allow Homeless To Choose Children's Schools

Scheduled to take effect next fall, the new regulations are expected to affect about 2,000 children living in shelters.

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On Capitol Hill: An Annual Ritual Opens Appropriations Season

Persistent lobbyists and reporters—and a stubborn subcommittee chairman—play an elaborate political game.

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Carter-Ford Panel Says Race Issues 'Moving Backward'

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—Charging that America is "moving backward" in its efforts to ensure full participation by minority citizens in the nation's life and prosperity, a panel of leaders from education, business, and government last week urged all segments of the society to work toward boosting opportunities for minorities.

In a report issued here, the 34-member commission—whose honorary co-chairmen were former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald R. Ford—acknowledges that minorities have made gains in educational achievement and income since the 1960's.

But these gains appear to have slowed or reversed, it states, and the disparities between minorities and the white majority are widening at a time when the minority proportion of the population is growing.

Failing to eliminate these gaps by the end of the century—when minorities will constitute an estimated one-third of the nation's population—would have grave consequences for all Americans, the panel concludes.

"Our democracy simply cannot succeed if one-third of our people—characterized by the color of their skin and their ethnic identity—are essentially cut off from participation in our national life," the commission's chairman, Frank H. T. Rhodes, president of Cornell University, said at a press conference.

"If we fail to address this problem adequately," he continued, "we will face not only social injustice, but also social disharmony and disruption."

"Such a failure," Mr. Rhodes warned, "would endanger our national security, as well as threaten our ability to compete in the international marketplace."

The panel, appointed by the American Council on Education and the Education Commission of the States, calls on colleges to strengthen efforts to recruit and retain minority students, and to work with schools to improve their precollegiate academic preparation.

In addition, it proposes that elected officials lead efforts to assure minority advancement and stimulate economic growth; that private and voluntary organizations initiate new programs to boost minority achievement and participation; and that minority public officials and groups expand their roles within the minority community. And it calls for a "new vision of affirmative action" that would stress voluntary efforts to expand opportunities for qualified minorities.

The goal of such efforts, the report states, is to eliminate "the gaps that mark our minority population as disadvantaged."

"Our hope," it says, "is that in 20 years, an examination of the statistics indicating educational access and achievement, employment and income, life expectancy, and other measures of social well being . . . will reveal no disadvantage for minorities in comparison with other groups in the population."

At least one member of the panel—Gov. John A. Ashcroft of Missouri—refused to sign the report. Mr. Ashcroft considered its conclusions "too negative," according to a spokesman. Another panelist, former U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers, had declined as of last week to indicate whether he would sign the document.

'Clarion Call'

The panel, known as the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, was formed in January and charged with issuing a "clarion call" on the need to reverse lagging minority participation in higher education and other sectors of society. *(See Education Week, Jan. 27, 1988.)*

Its distinguished roster of members included former Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, four governors, three former U.S. secretaries of state, corporate executives, civil-rights leaders, and college presidents.

According to Mr. Rhodes, the report's title—"One Third of a Nation"—is both a reference to the growing minority population and a reminder of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous phrase describing the Americans most needing help during the Great Depression.

'Lost Ground'

The report cites evidence that "the faltering pace" of minority advancement can be found "everywhere in our society—in our schools, on our college campuses, on the street corners of our cities."

"The statistics by which we measure our social and economic health and well-being clearly indicate that progress has virtually halted," it states, "and in many areas we have lost ground."

It notes, for example, that:

- Black median family income, which jumped from 54 percent of the white median in the 1950's to 61.5 percent in 1975, had fallen to 57.5 percent of the white median by 1985.
- Although the average scores for black students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test have increased over the past decade, they continue to lag behind those of whites. Of the 1.05 million high-school seniors who took the test in 1985, just over 70,000—9 percent—were black, and of those, 73 percent scored below 400 on the verbal section and 64 percent scored below 400 in mathematics. By contrast, among whites, only 31 percent scored below 400 on the verbal portion and 22 percent had math scores below that level.
- Despite "dramatic" improvements in high-school graduation rates among minority students, minority-group members are far less likely than whites to have a college education. In 1986, 20.1 percent of whites over 25 had completed four years of college; the rate for blacks was 10.9 percent, and for Hispanics, 8.4 percent.

'Passport to Opportunity'

The report notes that the decline in college participation is a particularly serious problem for minorities, since a college degree is increasingly "the passport to greater opportunity and achievement." But more important, it states, the decline is harmful to the nation as a whole, since society relies on college-trained citizens to become taxpayers and leaders.

"A decline in educational attainment by any substantial population group is cause for deep concern—especially at a time when technological advances and global competition put a premium on trained intelligence, advanced skills, and a high degree of adaptability," it says.

Reversing the trend in the minority college-going rate will require a concerted effort at all levels of education, the report says.

"The aptitude for higher education and the ability to succeed in college and graduate school do not suddenly materialize at age 18," it notes.

The report urges educators at all levels to "recognize their interdependence," and to work together to improve the precollegiate training of minority students.

In addition, it recommends that:

- Colleges renew and strengthen efforts to recruit and retain minority students and faculty members;
- National leaders include additional federal investment in programs for disadvantaged youths in any package to stimulate economic growth;
- Private and voluntary organizations create new programs for minority advancement, including internships, intervention efforts, remedial education, and enrichment activities; and
- Leaders from historically black colleges and other minority institutions "recognize their importance as role models" and work toward developing a new generation of leaders.

Parents See Reading Ability of Children as A Major Factor in Their Success as Adults

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—Parents view reading ability as one of the two major determinants of a child's prospects for success in life, a national survey has found.

That ability far outranks such factors as school attended, grades received, and family income and neighborhood, the respondents said. Only "time spent with parents" was rated as more crucial.

Moreover, nearly two-thirds of parents said reading skills were more important in today's "video-oriented society" than in the past.

The results of the poll of 1,000 parents of children ages 3 to 14 were presented last week at a press conference here. Officials of JELL-O Desserts—which commissioned the survey by the Roper polling firm—also announced the creation of a new reading program for pupils in grades 2-4.

The study corroborates earlier research findings that parents who read themselves and read to their children are more likely to foster a liking for reading. And, it found, parents consider themselves—not the schools—primarily responsible for developing children's reading skills and interests.

Readers Foster Readers

But they also said reading was by far the most crucial subject studied in school, with 97 percent rating it "very important." Arithmetic was ranked second, with 89 percent.

The high value placed on reading skills was consistent across all demographic groups, the survey found.

"Men and women, rich and poor, black and white, high-school dropout and college graduate, in nearly equal proportions value the importance of reading," said the pollster Burns Roper, president of the Roper Organization Inc.

But the survey also found gaps between parents' high regard for reading and their assessments of their children's reading abilities and interests. Two-thirds of parents said they were "very satisfied" with how well their children read, but only 51 percent said their children were "very interested" in reading. Such interest tends to drop significantly after the 5th grade, the survey found.

In addition, it found, parents consider how well their children read more important than how often they read. That opinion, the report notes, is contradicted by research showing that reading ability is directly related to reading frequency. Fewer than half the parents surveyed reported that their children read every day.

Secretary of Education William J. Bennett, who appeared at the press conference along with officials of national groups that promote reading, said he was encouraged by the almost universally high value parents place on reading.

"Parents are clear about what they think should happen, and they are right," said the Secretary, who has been a strong advocate of greater parental involvement in children's education.

But, added Ruth Graves, president of Reading Is Fundamental Inc., other results from the survey suggest that "the glass is ominously half full."

'Reading Rocket'

"Too many children are not reading as well or as often as they should," she said. "Reading must be practiced, not just valued."

The survey sponsor's new reading program is set to begin next fall in all elementary schools in four cities: Boston; Fresno, Calif.; Indianapolis; and Portland, Ore. The curricular supplement, known as "Reading Rocket," is aimed at instilling in young people a love for books, project officials said.

"We want to plant these seeds as early as possible, instead of waiting until children's interest falls off," said Nina Link, vice president and publisher of the Children's Television Workshop, which developed the program.

In addition to providing more in-class reading, Ms. Link noted, the program will foster parental involvement by requiring children and parents to sign a "pact" promising that they will read together outside class.

'Continued Stimulation'

The new poll's findings also suggest ways parents can encourage their children to read more, Mr. Roper said.

He recommended, for example, that parents continue to read with their children after they reach the 5th grade, in order to stave off the decline in reading interest that tends to occur at that time.

"Just because children start off with high interest in reading does not mean it stays forever without continued stimulation," he said.

Moreover, "parents of boys may need to be more vigilant than those with girls," he noted, since girls tend to be more interested in reading than boys.

Other findings from the survey include:

- Avid readers are as interested in their friends and games as those who read less often. "The avid reader is not a 'bookworm,' but is well-rounded," Mr. Roper said.
- Interest in reading and interest in television are not incompatible. Half of children interested in reading, the survey found, also have a strong interest in television.